

## **Dog Adoption FAQs**

### Which dogs are made available for adoption?

All dogs are assessed before they are made available for adoption or transfer to ensure that they do not have any significant behavior problems. The assessment includes simple things like whether the dog will allow you to hug him, how he reacts to strangers, etc. Dogs are assigned "adoption levels" based on what the staff has learned about them during their time here at the shelter and how they respond during the formal assessment. Dogs that exhibit behaviors that pose a safety risk to the public are not made available for adoption. At this time, pit bulls are not available for adoption from the Loudoun County Animal Shelter; however, they are eligible for transfer and placement by other organizations.

### What do the Meet Your Match colors mean?

Dogs are categorized by energy and activity level as either "purple" (low maintenance, laid-back, mellow, perfect for a quiet household), "orange" (average maintenance), or "green" (high maintenance, needing lots of exercise and attention). Although adopters can adopt any color dog, they are encouraged to match up their own color with their new dog to increase the odds that the match will be successful.

### What do the Adoption Levels mean?

Adoption levels describe the dog's general behavior (as opposed to activity level, which is described by color), ranging from Level 1 (the dog is easygoing, good for any type of home including first time owners and households with small children) to Level 5 (the dog exhibits some behavioral concerns, and must therefore be placed in a specific type of household that is equipped to meet its needs). Adopters must meet the level requirements of the dog they wish to adopt as well as any additional "special needs" requirements.

### How do I introduce a new dog to my cat?

The best way to help things go smoothly is to create a "safe room" for your cat that the new dog can't enter. Putting up a baby gate to block off a spare bedroom, bathroom, etc., usually does the job quite nicely. With the baby gate up, the cats can stay in the safe room (with their food, water, litter box, etc.) if they choose, or they can elect to venture out to meet the new dog. As long as they know they have a safe place to get away from the dog, they usually integrate very nicely; you may actually find that your cats like it so much you keep the safe room blocked off permanently.

### Where should my dog stay when I am not at home?

Many people mistakenly think it is best to leave dogs outside in the yard on nice, sunny days. However, dogs are most likely to get lost, destroy property, or suffer injury when they are left outside unattended. Dogs do best when kept securely inside your home while you are away. Many dog owners find that crate training is a good option for keeping their dogs safe while they are away, and it can also be a tool for jumpstarting the housetraining process. See the sections below on housetraining and crate training for more details.

### How do I introduce a new dog to my existing dog?

The best way to ensure a smooth introduction is to introduce the existing and new dogs somewhere neutral to both of them, like a park or schoolyard. When it looks like they are getting along fine, have the existing dog take the new dog home (in a manner of speaking!) Avoid just bringing the new dog directly home and introducing them there, since the existing dog may feel threatened. Also, be sure to feed the dogs separately and watch their interactions with toys, etc., carefully, to avoid squabbles. They will definitely need to work their relationship out (which can get very dramatic and very noisy!), but as long as scuffles end fairly quickly and neither dog is physically injured they should be fine.

### How do I know if the new dog is housetrained?

Housetraining is frequently a function of scheduling, so even the most well housetrained dog might have accidents when it enters a new home where the people get up at a different time than they are accustomed to, leave for work at a different time, go to bed at a different time, etc. Set your new dog up for success by assuming that he is not housetrained and “retraining” him when he first comes home. Take him outside on a leash to the same potty spot after he wakes up from a nap, about 15 minutes after he’s eaten or had a drink, and just after every play session. Wait with him until he goes, and praise him lavishly when he does. When you can’t keep an eye on him, put the dog in a crate or other confined area that is large enough for him to stand up, turn around, and lie down comfortably, but not large enough for him to distinguish a potty area from his sleeping area. Don’t scold him for any messes that you don’t actually see him making, and be sure to clean them up thoroughly with a cleaner specially designed to eliminate pet odor enzymes (regular carpet cleaner or ammonia won’t do the trick). By starting your new pet off right, getting him used to your routine, and helping him to understand where he is supposed to go, you will have a wonderful, dependably housetrained companion in no time!

### Should I take my new dog for obedience training?

Training a new dog is always a great idea! Training not only teaches or reinforces good manners; it solidifies the bond between you. Remember, though, that not all training is equal – look for trainers that use only positive reinforcement methods, as opposed to punishment based training or “alpha dog” type training (which can actually undermine your relationship with your dog and cause serious behavior problems). Shelter staff and volunteers use only “clicker” based training methods because we find that the dogs learn more quickly than with other methods and it keeps all of their experiences positive.

### What are the legal requirements for keeping a dog?

Most jurisdictions require current rabies vaccinations and annual licensing. In addition, many jurisdictions have leash laws that prohibit dogs from roaming. Check with your local animal control to determine what laws apply.

### Why would anyone get an adult dog? Aren’t puppies better?

Many people are under the mistaken impression that puppies and kids make the best combination (thinking that they will “grow up together”). Actually, the opposite is true – the

American Academy of Pediatrics, a national child advocacy agency, recommends that household with kids under 6 not introduce a puppy or kitten, especially one under 6 months old. That's because puppies & kittens are more likely to bite kids than older animals (they don't understand that kids don't intend to hurt them when they pull their fur, etc.) and because they don't fully develop their personalities until at least 6 months old, so an apparently kid-friendly pup may not be such a kid-tolerant adult. When you adopt an adult animal you have a much clearer picture of what their true nature and personality really is, and you can make a much better match between your family and your new pet.

#### Isn't it better to raise a dog yourself, since "it's all in how you raise them"?

Dogs, like people, are a product of both their genetics and their environment. Serious behavior problems can develop in any dog, even one raised with the most loving, responsible owners, because the dog may have genetic predispositions towards aggression. Alternatively, the most abused, battered and neglected dogs can still make wonderful pets in their new homes despite their horrible pasts. This is why staff performs such careful assessments of the dogs made available for adoption.

#### How do I choose a veterinarian?

As a County-funded agency we cannot recommend any veterinary office. Ask your friends/neighbors who they use, call various offices to compare prices for routine services (keeping in mind that prices vary widely from region to region), and perhaps even schedule a consultation with a few vets to see if you like their bedside manner. Establishing a relationship with a veterinary office early is important – you don't want to have an emergency happen and not have anyone to turn to.

#### What should I feed my new dog?

At the shelter, dogs are fed a generic dry dog food, along with donated foods mixed in, twice a day. You can feed your dog any brand that you prefer, as long as it is complete and balanced; your vet can recommend a brand and feeding schedule that will best meet your dog's nutritional needs. Your pet may experience a slight case of digestive upset during the transition, but this should pass in a day or two. Avoid feeding your new dog table scraps, as some human foods can be toxic to dogs (such as chocolate and grapes). Remember that being overweight is no better for dogs than it is for people, and dogs gain weight for the same reasons people do – too many calories and not enough exercise.

#### Grooming

All dogs need to be groomed regularly, even if they have short hair (in fact, some short haired breeds like Labs are notoriously big shedders!). Grooming requirements vary by breed – some just need weekly brushing, some need professional grooming, some "blow their coats" seasonally, etc.; staff can provide you with more specific advice about the grooming needs of the particular type of dog you are interested in. All dogs' nails should be trimmed regularly; if you are uncertain about how to trim nails, ask a shelter staffer for a demonstration. Dogs can be bathed with dog or baby shampoo periodically – be careful about bathing too frequently, as this can cause the dog's coat to either dry out or become too oily. Also, avoid shaving your dog

for the summer – dogs' coats are designed to naturally insulate them in winter and cool them in summer, and shaving interferes with that natural process (if you feel you must shave your dog, try shaving only a narrow strip along its belly).

#### What supplies do I need to get?

To prepare for your new dog's arrival, you should have a food bowl, water bowl, dog bed (or a soft place for it to lay), some toys (get a few varieties until you know what type your new dog prefers, and watch your dog carefully to be sure that it does not rip the toy and chew small pieces that could either lodge in its throat or cause digestive upset), a flat collar with an ID tag (never leave a choke or martingale-style collar on a dog unless you are actively working it on a leash; prong collars for dogs are completely unnecessary – ask a staffer for more details about alternatives), a leash, nail trimmers, and a grooming brush. If there's a cat in your household, you should purchase a baby gate to block off a "safe room" for the cat to stay in until he/she is acclimated to the new dog.

#### Will all male dogs "lift their legs" in the house?

Intact male dogs (and some female dogs in heat) will "lift their legs" to mark territory and signal that they are ready to mate. Male dogs that have been neutered at a young age typically never develop the habit of marking (although they may develop housesoiling problems, which are separate and distinct from marking). Dogs that are altered later in life may have already developed the habit of marking, and may do so even after they have been neutered and can no longer reproduce. Even altered dogs may mark in a new house when you first take them home; to counter this, keep your new dog on a leash for the first few days and redirect him to more appropriate behavior whenever you see that he is about to lift his leg. Once he has settled into his new surroundings, his need to mark should pass.

#### Why does the dog piddle on the floor when I say hello?

Some dogs are prone to "submissive urination", and will urinate a bit when they first see you or when you reach out to touch them. In "dog language", this is perfectly respectful behavior – it is a way of signaling that they respect you and defer to your authority. Getting angry with your dog for this behavior will only make the problem worse. Instead, use techniques to make your dog more confident and secure with you, and the problem should resolve itself. Ask a shelter staff member for assistance.

#### Should I put the new dog in a crate when I leave the house?

Crate training can be a wonderful tool to "babysit" dogs that can't be trusted not to chew inappropriate things while you are not there to watch them. Be sure that the crate you buy for this purpose is at least large enough for your dog to stand up, turn around and lie down comfortably; if your dog is already housetrained, it's a good idea for you to use the largest crate you can accommodate, so your dog can stretch his legs a bit. Technically, you don't even need to use an actual crate to use the "crate training" technique – any confined space will do (like a bathroom, or the corner of a kitchen). Remember that the goal is to ultimately wean your dog

off of the crate, if possible, so try and give your dog more and more room in addition to the crate until he can be completely trusted outside it.

#### What vaccinations, etc., do dogs need?

Your veterinarian will recommend a vaccination schedule appropriate for your new pet. This may include the following:

- Annual canine distemper combination vaccination, which prevents diseases such as distemper, parvo, hepatitis, and leptospirosis; typically puppies get a series of two to three booster shots, spaced one month apart, then begin getting their annual shots one year from the date of their final puppy booster.
- Rabies vaccination; typically puppies get their first rabies vaccination at four months of age, another vaccination one year later, and then are revaccinated every three years.
- Annual heartworm test, and year round heartworm preventative (typically a chewable treat given monthly).
- Year round flea/tick preventative (typically a liquid placed between the shoulder blades monthly).
- Other vaccinations that your veterinarian recommends (e.g. lyme disease vaccination).

#### How much does it cost to adopt a dog?

The adoption fees payable to the shelter are as follows:

Unspayed Females: \$125.00

Unneutered Males: \$115.00

Dogs Already Spayed/Neutered: \$50.00

Gray Whiskers Dogs 7 years old or older: Deduct \$25.00 from the adoption fee

If your adopted pet is not already spayed/neutered, the cost of surgery is included in the adoption fee. However, many vets require bloodwork, testing, rabies vaccination, etc., while the animal is at their hospital for surgery. You must call the vet to discuss whether any of these extras will apply, and if so, how much the total charge will be. If your adopted pet is already altered, you will receive a coupon for a free examination by one of our participating vets. The cost of any tests, vaccinations, etc., must be paid for by the adopter. It is important to remember that animals that experience illness or injury can be very expensive, and even healthy animals require yearly vaccinations and vet check-ups.